

Chinese Food for Life Care

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7753-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7753-4

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

China, a country of appealing mysteries.

The Chinese nation, a nation intermittently strong and weak, honorable and infamous, awake and asleep, with a history of five millennia at the shortest, though probably longer, has experienced the highest stages of ancient civilization in the most prosperous dynasties of the world, and made indelible contributions to the advance of human societies. As the world's biggest nation, the Chinese people account for approximately a quarter of the whole population on Earth.

As a standing member of the UN Security Council, China exerts enormous influence on international affairs. Economically speaking, it is the world's largest consumer market and human resource reservoir, as well as the largest base of processing industries.

Over the recent three decades, China's opening up to the world has brought about an unprecedented level of contact with people from all other countries, resulting in great advancements in Chinese society and a drastic growth of its economy, which have drawn even greater attention from the world.

As was the case in the past when China was in its prime, again, the world finds it impossible to overlook China and its people.

However, for its many sufferings in pre-modern and modern history – social unrest and setbacks, natural disasters and social misfortunes – for a long time, China has remained relatively backward, listed as a “developing country” of the world. For the same reasons, the Chinese people and their civilization have been neglected in the developed countries, and to many people in the West, what is now known of China remains what it was 30 or 50 years ago.

In view of the above conditions, we hereby present to our readers these brand new Chinese Way books with the aim of helping those who are interested in all things Chinese to learn about the people and their social life, and ultimately to discover “the last hidden world” and the nation that is once more on the rise in the Orient, so as to more effectively communicate with Chinese people in all walks of life.

Within this series, there are five books, respectively on the language, folk culture, rites and rituals, traditional food, and traditional physical

exercises of the Chinese people. Drawing upon vast resources from libraries and internet materials, these books are all written from the special perspectives of the writers themselves, and infused with their individual insights. What's more, the style of the language may also be interesting to Western English readers because the writers are all native Chinese themselves who teach English in higher institutions of education in China. This means that their English language may smack of some "Chinese flavor," somewhat different to that of the native English writers, but pleasantly readable nevertheless after minor revisions by native English speakers.

The Chinese Language Demystified by the undersigned chief-editor of this series begins with a general introduction of various "Chinese languages," languages of different Chinese ethnic groups as well as the majority Han people. The relation between Mandarin Chinese and Chinese dialects is also explained with fair clarity. Through reading the introduction, you will learn why Mandarin Chinese has become "the Common Language" (Putonghua) of the nation, how Chinese written characters evolved into the present form, and what differences exist between the classic and modern language, and between the formal written style and informal speech. In addition, the systems of Mandarin Chinese Pinyin and Tones are introduced in detail to serve as a threshold for exploring the contents of the book.

After the introduction are six chapters elaborating on the distinctive features of Mandarin Chinese, respectively in terms of its phonology, tones, morphology and syntax. In each chapter, typical and practically usable examples are provided, along with annotations of the tones and translations in order to help readers learn with ease. Finally, the book is rounded up with a seventh chapter summarizing the most prominent features to reinforce what the readers have read.

Chinese Rites and Rituals is co-authored by Ge Feng (冯鸽) and Zhengming Du (杜争鸣), professors of Chinese at the Northwest University and English at Soochow University respectively. The English translation has been done by Jieting Huang (黄洁婷) and Yinji Jiang (蒋茵佶), who are both English lecturers at Suzhou Vocational University. The book comprises an overall introduction of the Chinese ritual systems and the related social norms and customs. The first part begins with an elaboration of the central Chinese concept Li (礼), which carries a wide range of connotations including not only rites and rituals, but also what are generally concerned as good manners, appropriate behavior and acceptable ceremonies for various social occasions.

The contents are divided into two parts, with the first part on traditional rites and rituals and the second on the modern practice. Actually, all possible aspects, which are appropriate for consideration under the general title of Li, are touched upon, from individual social conduct to state rules. With the understanding that Li is a matter of great importance in Chinese culture, we believe this book is of special value for those who wish to learn about the Chinese society and the Chinese way of thinking and life.

In *Chinese Food for Life Care*, authored by Hua Yang (杨娅) and Wen Guo (郭雯), lecturers of English at the Soochow University of Science and Technology, readers are expected to learn about the traditional Chinese way of eating, and find their opinions as regards the choices of food in various situations. They will also familiarize themselves with a great variety of traditionally consumed Chinese food items, and learn to understand why some items are more popular than others in China, as well as why the Chinese people generally believe “food and medicine are of the same origin.” It is our hope that the detailed accounts of the properties of different food items will serve as useful references for making decisions on what one should choose to eat according to his or her own physical conditions.

Traditional Chinese Exercises is written by Jianmei Qu (曲建梅) and her daughter Xinqing Wang (王新清), respectively an associate professor of English at Yantai University and an MA student of English at Shandong University.

The book begins with a brief account of the basic knowledge of Chinese physical exercises and health care, a short history of the development of various methods of traditional physical exercises, such as Taijiquan and Qigong, the basic theories concerning their efficacy and mechanisms, and the methods generally adopted in practice. Then, in the following chapters, the concrete procedures of exercises are presented, all well illustrated with clear pictures to aid the practitioner. In addition, traditionally practiced supporting “minor exercises” including various methods of self-massage are also introduced at length. It is our belief that the explanations and illustrations not only make interesting reading, but also help in practice.

Traditional Chinese Folk Customs is written by Huawen Fang (方华文), my colleague at Soochow University. Its first draft translation was completed by Weihua Zhang (张伟华), associate professor of English at Wuxi Institute of Arts and Technology. At the request of the writer and the publisher, I gladly sign my name as a co-translator after reading and

revising the manuscript. This book projects to the readers a changing and kaleidoscopic view of Chinese social phenomena seen in different areas and ethnic communities, in both ancient times and the present. Although it is understandably difficult for the writers to account for how much or to what extent the old customs have lasted to date, we can well assume that quite a lot have, though possibly in somewhat changed forms. At any rate, they should have some ineluctable impact on the contemporary Chinese way of life. In addition, with the growing consciousness of the importance of protecting traditional culture, some wholesome folkways that had once fallen to the verge of extinction are now being recovered, while others are still often found in Chinese literary works even if they have fallen out of date. Thus, reading about them should be rewarding, and as I hope, it could also be enjoyable.

On the whole, the five titles in these Chinese Way books form a kind of knowledge pool for readers interested in Chinese society, the people, and their way of thinking and social behavior. I believe they will be of very practical use for those who are presently working in China, or considering a visit or some time staying there. For readers of Chinese literature, the contents should also be worth reading because they provide knowledge of the social and cultural background to aid understanding.

I feel obliged to acknowledge the help of many who have given me very good suggestions as regards the contents of the books. First, I am grateful to Professor Xiaoming Tian (田晓明), Vice President of Soochow University and an open-minded scholar in arts and education who has seen the meaningfulness of these books and urged me to carry on. Then, for making the plan more concrete and practical, I feel indebted to Mr. Jinhui Deng (邓锦辉) and Mr. Lei Zheng (郑磊), editors of China Intercontinental Press, for providing many insightful suggestions. Last but not the least, my gratitude goes to Mr. Mingming Chen (陈明明), vice-chairman of the Translators Association of China and an ex-ambassador of China to New Zealand and Sweden, for he has been a constant source of encouragement in any of my endeavors of translation and writing.

July 5th, 2015
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INTRODUCTION

Most people take prescribed drugs when ill, taking recovery for granted. However, it's not that simple. The Chinese people believe no quick fix comes without a downside, and that a drug may cause a number of unwanted side effects along with its intended curing results.

Here's the question: If you were told that a drug you are taking has been found to increase the risk of death by 100 percent, would you stop taking it? Yes, of course. But on reflection, you might change your mind. Anyway, does that statement really mean that you are more likely to die if you keep taking the drug? No, absolutely not. If there's the possibility of addiction, would you refuse to provide painkillers to someone, only to see him suffer in despair? If a drug for lowering cholesterol is linked to "significant" sleep problems, but your cholesterol will go through the roof without it, what would you do?

These questions will certainly put you in a dilemma! Typically, you'll endlessly look up articles or books and you'll ask doctors, consultants, and anyone who is involved in your treatment for answers. Frustratingly, you'll most probably run into a brick wall, for hardly anyone can answer your questions.

So is there an alternative? Why not address health problems before we even get ill? Our body, with the help of the right food, has the natural ability to defend, repair and restore itself. No above-mentioned dilemma; no need to spend hours in the gym; no expensive anti-ageing treatments. You just need to start with your diet, and eat for optimal health to strengthen your immunity. When the immune system is healthy, it can counteract the development of disease and any adverse effects. It will also enable you to self-heal when there are latent problems. The need to take harmful drugs in response to a serious illness can be greatly reduced. You only need to care about the quality of your life and be willing to learn a few basic principles. Most people are perfectly capable of reading literature and making a responsible decision on what, when and how to eat. "If our diet is wrong, no doctor can cure us; if we eat right, no doctor is needed" (Victor G. Rocine circa 1930). As an example, *Su Ma La Gu* (苏麻喇姑), a

famous Chinese woman in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), lived for 92 years without taking any medicine. And there are numerous people in China who have lived longer for the same reason; that is, following the law of traditional Chinese life-care, in which reasonable diet is an indispensable part.

The History of Chinese Food Life-Care

Here in China, food is an integral part of the Chinese culture. People have been creating dishes with fascinating combinations of flavors, textures and colors that cater to the love of food and health since time immemorial.

Derived from Taoist philosophy and based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM, characterized by herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage, and *Qi-gong* (deep breathing exercises)), Chinese food healthcare dates back as early as 3,000 BC and is accredited to Shen Nung (Shen Nong, 神农), who, in experimenting with foods containing toxins, accidentally discovered the medicinal properties of many and various plants, and used them to treat human diseases. Therefore, we Chinese recognize him as the father of Chinese herbal medicine. The first TCM documentation came out around 500 BC, entitled *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, also known as *Nei Jing* (《黄帝内经》). This book points out for the first time in Chinese history that food and herbs are of the same origin – animals and plants (药食同源). Moreover, food is classified into five types in nature, having five tastes and different functions on the body. To the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), the association of food and medicine was further emphasized and food life-care developed into a sophisticated practice among Chinese people. As Sun Si-miao (孙思邈), a nationally renowned TCM practitioner, summarized, “food is for everyday life-care, and medicine for acute diseases (安身之本, 必资于食; 救疾之速, 必凭于药)”. During the Qing Dynasty, Chinese royal families were all staffed with a nutritionist who was in charge of the Emperor's diet. Among their most successful practices was that of Emperor Kang'xi, whose reign of 61 years made him the longest-reigning Chinese Emperor. Another is the case of Empress Ci'xi, whose beauty seemed ageless.

Featuring natural ingredients, Chinese food life-care to date has accumulated a large repertoire of delicious health recipes that have been continuously improved over thousands of years.

What Is an Appropriate Diet according to Traditional Chinese Medicine?

In general, Chinese food life-care is based on three principles: proper ingredients, balanced nutriment, and personally fitting food.

In terms of proper ingredients, this refers to the freshness of food. For one thing, *The Analects* (《论语》, 300 B.C.) recorded the remarks of Confucius about food, “the ingredients can never be too fresh and prepared too delicately, for the sake of bringing out the charm and soul of them. No moldy, rotting, discolored food should be eaten (食不厌精, 脍不厌细, 肉败不食, 色恶不食).” For another, in-season homegrown ingredients are regarded as being far superior to their under-ripe, genetically engineered counterparts, no matter how much modern food processing and worldwide distribution of food are making grocery stores shelves look much the same in December as they do in July. It is because in TCM, the body is seen as a microcosm of the natural world, waxing and waning with the movements of the seasons, and eating in-season food items would in one way help the human body to keep pace with Mother Nature. From a modern perspective, it is that in-season food usually does not contain added hormones, antibiotics or other drugs.

On the other hand, it is thought that many, if not most, of our health problems are related to the imbalance of ingredients in our diet. First, we have to maintain a balance between *Yin* and *Yang*. These two terms are to a person what the cathode and anode are to a battery. All those possessing the solid, excessive, exterior, upward, warm, hyperactive can be put into the category of *Yang*. *Yin*, a concept opposite to *Yang*, refers to the liquid, deficient, interior, downward, and cold. The two keep a dynamic equilibrium through fighting and restricting each other. By eating food of the right combination, the necessary balance can be maintained, or if lost, restored. Thus, *Yang* (hot) – featuring foods including meat, seafood, tonics, and fried food – should be eaten with *Yin* (cold) food, such as vegetables and fresh fruit. Excesses of food featuring only *Yin* or *Yang* could result in various illnesses, e.g. *Yang* excess results in fever and dehydration.

Aside from this, the Chinese lay great stress on the harmonious combination of the food's properties, such as the nature (hot, warm, neutral, cool, cold (性热, 性温, 性平, 性凉, 性寒) and the taste (sweet, sour, bitter, salty and pungent (甘, 酸, 苦, 咸, 辛) in *Nei Jing*). TCM holds that when each nature or taste is consumed in moderation, it benefits

the whole body. Over-indulgence in any nature or taste harms a certain organ, creates imbalance and leads to illnesses.

Most importantly, Chinese food life-care is personal, which means that the individual Chinese person eats according to his or her physical conditions (constitution). There are about seven types defined by symptoms or personal physical qualities: the *Yin-Yang* harmonious (平和体质), the Hot (热性体质), the *Yin*-deficient (阴虚体质), the *Yang*-deficient (阳虚体质), the Phlegm-damp (痰湿体质), the *Qi*-deficient (气虚体质) and the Blood-stagnated (淤血体质).

Here, TCM and Western-style food health care diverge. For example, the US Food and Drug Administration's food pyramid stresses consuming 6-11 servings of grains like rice, bread and pasta, 3-5 servings of vegetables, 2-4 servings of fruit and 2-3 servings of meat and milk products per day to receive the "recommended daily allowances" of nutrients, while TCM holds that not everyone needs – or should have – these quantities, for it depends on the individual's physical constitution. Even water is not always suitable for everyone.

In sum, you have to consider the season, your body's constitution, and the properties of the food before you include it in your diet. The last chapter of this book will elaborate more on the ramifications of this topic.

Criticism of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Seen through the lens of biology and biochemistry, TCM may seem to lack a scientific basis and lacks double-blind placebo studies. It may also seem to be rather philosophical with all the seemingly vague concepts like *Qi*, *Yin*, and *Yang*. We will hereby briefly address the problem about the effectiveness of TCM on which Chinese life-care is based.

Firstly, it is important to mention that some of the old TCM beliefs are now finding a scientific basis. For example, crab was recently found to contain a considerable amount of copper, and it is known that copper promotes inflammation or growth, which proves a long-standing belief in the Chinese dietary system that crab has such a function. The same has happened with the pearl. Many ancient TCM classics recorded pearls' medicinal value in treating faintness, stopping bleeding, and counteracting toxic effects. Now, scientists have detected large quantities of calcium carbonates in pearls, which are a strong inhibitor of bacterial growth. In addition, TCM's beneficial effects for type 2 diabetes have gained some scientific validation too. A collaborative research project at the Garvan

Institute has revealed that the natural plant product berberine is really a valuable treatment through modern scientific methods.

It may come to pass that science will validate the effectiveness and mechanisms of more herbal medicines, but that research will not come quickly or easily due to those logistical problems. After all, Aspirin, which has been in use for more than 100 years, has only recently had its physiological mechanism explained.

Secondly, TCM has been and is still widely used in China to treat digestive disorders, respiratory diseases, stroke, infertility and many other difficult-to-treat conditions, and there is ample anecdotal evidence proving its curing abilities. For instance, one of the writer's colleagues suffered for a long time after stomach surgery, vomiting up almost all that she ate, and she was unable to lay flat in bed to sleep at night. She tried many western medicines, all virtually in vain. Finally after turning to a so-called *Pian Fang* (folk TCM formulary), she began to get better. She can now eat with ease and stretch out to sleep. This is the truth. For more case studies, please check *Traditional Chinese Medicine: Clinical Case Studies* edited by Professor Chen Keji, MD, published by Foreign Languages Press and New World Press, Beijing, 1994.

It is also well worth mentioning that many famous TCM practitioners were Chinese imperial physicians. If TCM was only a placebo, in case of repeated failures, its practitioners would have been executed by their masters long before they could write down their experience, which goes against the fact that most ancient imperial TCM practitioners died a natural death and wrote books such as *Essentials of Nei Jing* (《内经要旨》) by Xu Chun-fu of the Ming Dynasty, and *Commentary of Classic on Medical Problems* (《难经经释》) by Xu Da-chun of the Qing Dynasty.

Possibly the greatest difference between Western medicine and TCM is that a Western patient would look for a drug to treat symptoms with quick results, while a Chinese patient would see the prescribed TCM treatment as part of a longer-term process to restore the body's overall equilibrium. On balance, while it is widely admitted that Western medicine is an optimum approach to most acute diseases, TCM is probably more effective in chronic cases, in prevention and life-care. The point is not ignoring the differences, but seeing them from both sides. It is advised that pharmacological and physical treatments alone are not all that are needed; Westerners could also learn a different approach toward health from their Eastern counterparts – a more holistic, far-reaching approach.

About the Book

The present book offers a well-illustrated guide to Chinese food life-care, relying on the vast amounts of trial-and-error medical practice over the past 3,000 years. With this book, you will be empowered to take full advantage of this time-tested wisdom of eating purposely for beauty, health and longevity.

There are six chapters: The first five chapters focus on commonly eaten foods' effects and uses, and the sixth introduces personal solutions, taking into account an individual's physical conditions (constitution), a food item's property and the season.

While reading, you will learn something very serious and useful: how to like yourself better and how to make your body like you better.

Information about food and physical conditions is given in a clear and down-to-earth way. We discuss how each ingredient has been traditionally used in China, particularly the conditions for which they are adopted. We then show why these ingredients work, drawing on modern scientific research. Finally, we provide a recipe for each ingredient, which we hope you will be able to incorporate into your own food life-care plan. All the recipes are practical, and most can be quickly and easily prepared. We also try to include only those ingredients that can be found on most supermarket shelves, wherever possible. Whenever Chinese characters are used, the pinyin Romanization is given for easier access to the food. Pick whichever fit your schedule and lifestyle. Note that Chinese food life-care does not emphasize the use of spices, which means some dishes could taste a little plain; so once you've tried a recipe, you're welcome to adjust the amount of seasonings to best suit your individual taste. Flexibility and adjustment is allowed. Commonly used TCM expressions and a list of the 24 solar terms are provided in a glossary at the back.

The intended audience is those who are interested in taking responsibility for their own health, those who are tired of being sick. Keep this book in your kitchen to provide a context for expressing an important part of yourself. Now let's feel good – and enjoy our food!

Of course, diet is only one factor that affects human health. Other significant factors play just as vital a role in life-care, such as the influences of gender, genetics, or lifestyle patterns. This book is intended to promote healthy eating, remind you of possible trigger foods, and be used to complement primary care. Good health is the ultimate purpose, so don't be too obsessive, as worry is another trigger of diseases. This book also presents information that is general in nature. Please consult your

doctors for treatment regarding your health conditions and seek their advice when choosing our therapeutic food.

CHAPTER ONE¹

GRAINS AND BEANS

Grains

Chinese people adore coarse grains. Where there is grain, there is food. An indispensable source of human nutrition, grain has been regarded as the basic daily staple consumed by almost every Chinese household. As TCM states, “Grain is the best for the spleen. Of all the things that heaven fosters, it is the most valuable one.”

The types of grains grown in the north and the south of China are different due to different geographies. This gives rise to a different style of food predominating in the South compared with what is eaten in the North. Southern food, with rice as the principal food, is simple, while northern food, characterized by wheat flour, is more complicated.

The following are various kinds of grains that may please different tastes.

1. Rice (大米 da mǐ)

Nature: Warm

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Spleen and Stomach

Health Benefits:

With a soft taste and flavor, rice is an essential staple in China, especially in the Southern areas. Easy to digest and rich in various nutritious elements, it is popular among almost every age group.

As quoted from *Compendium of Materia Medica* (《本草纲目》), “Polished round-grain rice can invigorate the spleen and replenish *Qi*, thus

¹ Many thanks to Michael Frank Stevenson for his help in proofreading the present book.

nourishing *Yin* and benefiting the stomach. It also promotes fluid production and improves eyesight as well.”

Additionally, according to Chinese Dietary Therapy, rice will benefit those who have a *Qi* deficiency of the spleen and stomach when it is cooked with lotus seed, ginseng and Chinese dates.

Moreover, it can be made into congee with almonds, which is used as an ordinary dish for those with asthma or a cough.

Modern Research:

Rice is rich in sugar, amino acids, minerals trace elements, etc., helping to enhance stomach peristalsis and prevent arteriosclerosis.

Some scientists believe that the high content of insoluble fiber may help protect against a variety of cancers. In an analysis of some studies, people who eat rice a lot were reported to have a low risk of lymphoma and cancers of the stomach, breast, uterus, throat, liver, and thyroid, etc.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Rice:

Rice is beneficial for anyone who is:

Physically weak with *Qi* deficiency of the spleen and stomach;

Sick or after operation;

Recovering from a long-term disease.

People with the following conditions cannot eat much rice:

Diabetes;

Yin-deficiency and heat exuberance in menopause.

Let's Cook Rice:

Rice-based dishes are found everywhere in China, and come in various shapes and forms, rice noodles, rice cakes and stuffed glutinous rice balls, for example. However, a combination of rice and honey may lead to stomachache.

Recommended Recipe: Stir-fried Rice with Tomato and Egg (番茄蛋炒饭)

This dish is nourishing, easy to cook, and is frequently seen in Chinese restaurants as well as in the households of common people.

Ingredients: 200 g rice, 1 egg, 1 tomato, 20 g peas, 1/2 onion

Seasonings: vegetable oil, tomato paste, salt, white sugar, pepper

Preparation:

1. Precook rice. Cut the tomato and onion into small pieces. Heat saucepan over high heat.

2. Add 1 tablespoon vegetable oil. Add egg, stir and cook for 30

seconds. Add some more oil, put in the onion and stir for a while.

3. Add the cooked rice and mix well, turning, for 3 minutes until the rice mixture is very hot. Add the seasonings to taste, pour over rice, and mix thoroughly.

2. Maize (玉米 Yù Mǐ)

Nature: Neutral

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Spleen, Stomach and Kidneys

Health Benefits:

Maize is recognized globally as a “golden crop” and the healthiest and most nutritious food among all the staples. As asserted in *Compendium of Materia Medica* (《本草纲目》), maize is beneficial to the stomach and lungs, and has a diuretic effect. It will calm the heart and invigorate the stomach.

Eating maize regularly will decrease blood cholesterol levels, and the risk of high blood pressure and coronary heart disease as well as arteriosclerosis.

As for healthful diets, maize can be cooked with rice and beans to invigorate strength. A stir-fried dish with maize, pepper, peas and shrimps will benefit those who have *Qi* deficiency of the spleen and stomach, and those who have suffered from high blood cholesterol.

Modern Research:

Maize is rich in protein, lecithin, linoleic acid, phytosterols and vitamin E. Its dietary fiber can promote stomach peristalsis, metabolism and blood circulation. Moreover, the rich amount of vitamin E will prolong life and prevent cancer. Maize germ is so nutritious that it can modulate the nerve system and free one from wrinkles.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Maize:

Maize is especially useful in the following cases:

Qi deficiency of the spleen and stomach;

Deficiency of vitamin A;

Weakness of physique.

However, the following groups are not advised to eat much:

Diabetics;

Patients with Sjogren's Syndrome;

Patients with Skin Disease.

Let's Cook Maize:

Recommended Recipe: Steamed Sweet Maize with Glutinous Rice (玉米蒸糯米)

Ingredients: 3 maize stalks, glutinous rice

Seasonings: white sugar

Preparation:

1. Cut the maize stalks into several segments and put them on a plate.
2. Mix the glutinous rice with water and make it into wine.
3. Pour the glutinous rice wine on the prepared maize, steam for some minutes and take out to cool.

This dish can also be served hot if desired.

3. Millet (小米 Xiǎo Mǐ)

Nature: Neutral and Slightly Warm

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Kidney, Spleen and Stomach

Health Benefits:

Millet is tasty, with a mildly sweet, nut-like flavor and contains a myriad of beneficial nutrients. The “Head of the Five Grains”, millet is one of the oldest foods known to humans and possibly the first cereal grain to be used.

Compendium of Materia Medica (《本草纲目》) states that millet is favorable for those who have kidney disease, and those who have a weak spleen and stomach, helping to clear the stomach and purge heat.

For those who often feel fatigued or have *Qi* deficiency of the spleen and stomach, millet, when cooked with lotus seeds and Chinese yam, can strengthen the physique. What's more, congee made with millet, dried longan pulp and red dates efficiently replenishes the blood, nourishes the heart and soothe the nerves.

As a highly nutritious, non-glutinous, and non-acid-forming food, millet is soothing and easy to digest. In fact, it is considered to be one of the least allergenic and most digestible grains available. The slightly warm property is believed to help heat the body and alleviate dampness in cold or rainy seasons.

Modern Research:

Millet contains large amounts of protein, dietary fiber, B-complex vitamins, the amino acid methionine, lecithin, and vitamin E. It is

particularly high in the minerals iron, magnesium, phosphorous, and potassium.

It is reported that the seeds are also rich in phytochemicals, including phytic acid, which is believed to lower cholesterol, and phytate, which is associated with cancer risk reduction.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Millet:

Millet is good for treating the following cases:

Spleen and stomach weakness;

Vomiting;

Epigastric and abdominal distension.

Patients with thirst and a bitter taste in the mouth may take millet regularly.

Let's Cook Millet

Millet is delicious and wonderfully versatile. It can be added to breads, soups, stews, and stuffing. It can be served as a side dish or eaten with beans and vegetables, and can be popped like maize as a snack or breakfast cereal.

Recommended Recipe: Millet Maize Porridge (小米玉米稀饭)

Ingredients: millet, maize and rice, 20 g each

Preparation: Wash millet, maize and rice clean. Add water to the pot and boil over medium heat. Put the rice into the pot and cook over low heat for 15 minutes. Then add millet and maize to cook until they are thick.

The porridge is good for nourishing the spleen and invigorating the stomach; it is especially easy for children to digest.

4. Wheat (小麦 Xiǎo Mài)

Nature: Cold

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Spleen, Stomach, Heart and Kidneys

Health Benefits:

Compendium of Materia Medica (《本草纲目》) states, “Wheat can be decocted to consolidate [the] exterior for curbing excessive sweat. Moreover, it will treat deficiency syndrome, strengthening the physique and invigorating [the] stomach.” In addition, wheat is used to restore normal coordination between the heart and kidneys, and to nourish the spleen and stomach as well.

Chinese culinary tradition has it that wheat can be decocted with red dates and licorice to treat insomnia and emotional symptoms such as the tendency to be depressed. A dish made from wheat and soybeans has higher levels of protein than beef and other meats alike. Moreover, wheat served with rice will work efficiently to nourish the spleen and heart, and invigorate the kidneys and blood circulation.

Modern Research:

Rich in nutrients such as protein, carbohydrates, fiber, thiamine, niacin, iron, zinc and riboflavin, wheat helps to alleviate mental stress and supplements unsaturated fatty acids and vitamin E, with an obvious effect of improving blood pressure and enhancing brain function.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Wheat:

It is particularly beneficial for people with the following conditions:

Insomnia and dysphoria;

Insufficiency of heart blood;

Beriberi;

Peripheral nerve discomfort;

Spontaneous sweating and night sweats.

Let's Cook Wheat:

In early times, wheat was used to make “pancakes”. After it was grounded into flour, water was added and the resulting mixture rolled into cake-shaped pieces, which were baked, roasted or steamed. Today, it is enjoyed in various forms, popular in almost every Chinese household.

Recommended Recipe: Steamed Wheat Buns (小麦馒头)

Ingredients: 500 g wheat flour

Seasonings: vegetable oil, white sugar, cream cheese, honey

Preparation:

1. Mix the wheat flour with the sugar and cream cheese; cover the pastry with a wet cloth for 30 minutes.
2. Make the pastry into several buns and steam them for 10 minutes.
3. If desired, fry them until the color turns brown.
4. Serve hot, with the cream cheese and honey to taste.

This dish is rather common in the north of China, and is especially accepted by senior citizens as an accompaniment to their breakfast or supper.

5. Oat (燕麦 Yàn Mài)

Nature: Cold

Taste: Slightly Salty

Acts on Organ: Spleen, Stomach and Kidneys

Health Benefits:

Oat is said to help strengthen the spleen and supplement *Qi*, curbing excessive sweating. TCM has it that oat, while cooked with wheat, is efficient for people who have spontaneous sweating and night sweats, benefiting the spleen and heart. For those who want to decrease blood fat and lose weight, make oat porridge mixed with milk. Additionally, people who feel fatigue and have no appetite in the summer can eat oat accompanied with milk and fruit.

Oat has desirable health benefits; no wonder more and more Chinese people prefer to have oatmeal for their breakfast.

Modern Research:

Oat contains protein, vitamin B, vitamin E, and abundant minerals. It can protect against cancer and heart disease, enhance the immune system's response to infection, stabilize blood sugar, and soothe skin conditions and other ailments.

Moreover, oat can be used as an antispasmodic, a diuretic, an emollient, a nerve tonic, a supplement, an aphrodisiac, and a stimulant.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Oat:

The elderly, puerperal women and babies are generally advised to take more oats, as well as people with the following conditions:

Constipation;

Diabetes;

Arteriosclerosis;

Weak spleen and kidneys.

Caution: Women with habitual abortion are not advised to take much.

Let's Cook Oat:

Recommended Recipe: Pumpkin and Oat Congee (南瓜燕麦粥)

Ingredients: pumpkin, oat and rice

Seasonings: salt or sugar (optional)

Preparation:

1. Peel the pumpkin and cut it into small cubes.

2. Wash the rice and oats clean and soak for 2 hours. Put water into the

pot and boil it. Add the rice and oats to cook for 30 minutes.

3. Add in the diced pumpkin and boil for another 15 minutes. Add salt or sugar to taste.

6. Barley (大麦 Dà Mài)

Nature: Cool

Taste: Slightly Salty

Acts on Organ: Spleen and Stomach

Health Benefits:

Well known for its “three highs and two lows”, namely high protein, high dietary fiber, high vitamin content, low fat, and low sugar, barley is your ideal choice for health care. The Chinese often cook barley with rice to strengthen the spleen and stomach.

Variorum of Shen Nong's Herbal (《神农本草经疏》) states that barley helps to reinforce Middle-energizer and replenish *Qi*, invigorating the function of the stomach. For patients with ulcers of the stomach and duodenum, food containing barley flour is an aid to treatment.

In addition, *Taiping Sheng Hui Fang* (《太平圣惠方》) also records a medicinal diet in which barley can be mixed with ginger juice and honey. This can be decocted to treat the syndrome of urinary stoppage and urination pain.

Modern Research:

With abundant nutrients like sugar, protein, dietary fiber, vitamin B1, vitamin B2 and minerals, barley is useful to treat illnesses such as high cholesterol levels, heart disease, and cancer. It is also a desirable treatment for diabetes and hypertension, as well as a bowel-cleaning medicine.

Its rich dietary fiber is reported to prevent diseases of the cardiovascular system.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Barley:

People with the following conditions are encouraged to take barley:

Qi deficiency of the spleen and stomach;

Dyspepsia and poor appetite;

Liver diseases.

However, *Yao Pin Hua Yi* (《药品化义》) says that the patients with asthma are not advised to eat much. Pregnant women are not advised to take barley, because it will lead to abortion.

Let's Cook Barley:

Recommended Recipe: Stir-fried Barley with Vegetables (大麦炒蔬菜)

Ingredients: 1/2 cup barley; 1 cup thinly sliced eggplant; 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped; 1/2 cup chopped onion; 1/2 cup chopped red pepper; peanuts; diced carrot; water

Seasonings: vegetable oil, sugar, soy sauce

Preparation:

1. Place barley and water in pan; bring to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook until barley is tender and liquid is absorbed.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil over high heat. Add garlic and stir-fry immediately. Add cooked barley; stir-fry for 3 minutes.
3. Remove barley. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Add eggplant, pepper and onion and stir-fry 3 minutes.
4. Add sugar and soy sauce and cook for 2 more minutes. Return the prepared barley mixture to the pan; stir-fry for 3 minutes.
5. Sprinkle with peanuts and diced carrot. Serve hot.

7. Job's Tears (Coix lacryma-jobi, Yi Mǐ 薏米)

Nature: Cold

Taste: Slightly sweet

Acts on Organ: Kidney and Stomach

Health Benefits:

Job's tears are native to East Asia and used to be made into Palace Cuisine only for emperors during ancient Chinese dynasties. The grain is valued as a nutritious food and has long been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine to support beautiful hair, skin and nails, and as a digestive aid, among other claims.

According to *Yao Pin Hua Yi* (《药品化义》), Job's tears can invigorate *Qi*, clear the intestines, relieve rigidity of muscles and activate collateral vessels.

It is also utilized in soups, porridge, drinks and pastries as an indispensable ingredient. One example that can be given is the dish of Job's tears cooked with rice, which is widely believed by the Chinese to maintain youth and beauty if taken for a long period.

Modern Research:

Like most cereal grains, Job's tears are nutritious, containing essential amino acids, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Reportedly, the grain has higher contents of protein than most cereals. It is good for painful joints,

rheumatism and edema. It will promote metabolism and has cancer-fighting properties.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Job's Tears:

Job's tears can work to treat the following cases:

Poor appetite, chronic ulcer and diarrhea;

Cancers;

Arthritis.

Nevertheless, the people listed as follows are not supposed to take much:

Women who are pregnant or menstruating;

Anyone who is constipated.

Let's Cook Job's Tears:

Chinese people like porridge, for they think that porridge can be easily digested and keep everything ticking over nicely. Anyone accustomed to excessive meats and seafood can have some vegetable or wild herb porridge to increase essential vitamins, and improve kidney function.

Recommended Recipe: Job's Tears Porridge with Fruit Pulp (薏米果肉粥)

Ingredients: 200 g Job's tears, 100 g rice, pineapple, pear and apple

Seasonings: crystal sugar, honey (optional)

Preparation:

1. Wash the Job's tears and glutinous rice and soak for 2 hours.
2. Cut fruit into small cubes. Make porridge over high heat until it becomes thick.
3. Add in fruit pulp and crystal sugar; cook over low heat for 10 minutes.
4. If needed, put some honey on the surface of the porridge.

8. Sesame (芝麻 Zhi Ma)

Nature: Neutral

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Liver, Kidneys and Intestines

Health Benefits:

Generally speaking, black sesame is more prized in China for life-care, while its white counterpart is often made into sesame oil as flavoring. In ancient China, sesame had long been acclaimed as a healthful food to help prolong life. Nowadays, it is still reputed to be "an effective anti-ageing food."

According to the records in TCM, sesame nourishes the liver and kidneys, helps to moisturize the intestines, and supplements the blood. When cooked with peanuts in their skins, sesame can benefit those who have fewer hematoblasts. What's more, fried sesame seeds can be ground with mulberry leaves, which, when combined with rice porridge, are especially beneficial to those with liver and kidney problems, or those who have eye diseases or dry skin.

Modern Research:

As a nutritious plant, sesame also contains “three highs”, namely high calcium, high iron, and high protein levels. Its richness in vitamin E helps to prolong life expectancy.

Sesame also improves blood circulation, advances metabolism, and clears cholesterol on the vascular walls.

You Might (Not) Want To Take Sesame:

Sesame may be used for the following cases:

Dizziness;

Poor eyesight;

Liver and kidney deficiencies;

Alopecia;

Postpartum deficiency of breast milk.

However, it is not recommended for the following conditions:

Chronic enteritis;

Diarrhea;

Dryness-heat

Let's Cook Sesame:

Recommended Recipe: Sesame Milk Congee with Fruit (芝麻牛奶水果粥)

Ingredients: ripe black sesame seeds, 100 g rice, fresh milk, diced watermelon, diced apple

Seasonings: white sugar

Preparation:

1. Wash the black sesame seeds and rice; put the fruit pulp aside.
2. Boil the rice in some water for 30 minutes over medium heat.
3. Add some fresh milk and the ripe black sesame seeds to the pot and boil over medium heat.
4. Put in the fruit and add sugar to taste.

Beans

As a good source of essential B vitamins, fiber, protein and iron, beans have enjoyed tremendous popularity among Chinese people, often used as a good accompaniment with other staples, vegetables or fruit. Many believe that beans are one of the richest sources of fiber to help lower cholesterol levels. Additionally, beans are a great food for a fat-restricted diet, because most beans contain quite low amounts of fat. What's more, scientific studies have proved that most beans can provide long-lasting energy, for they contain at least 20% protein and are high in carbohydrates.

You are probably already eager to know more about the “great beans”. The following section will tell you about some of the most commonly consumed beans in China.

1. Soybean (大豆 Dà Dòu)

Nature: Neutral

Taste: Sweet

Acts on Organ: Spleen and Stomach

Health Benefits:

Cultivated for over 3,000 years in China and known as “the meat among all plants”, the soybean was among the first varieties of food to be domesticated by human. However, it was not until the West Han Dynasty (26 B.C.-25 A.D.), after the emergence of tofu, that the soybean became available to people from all walks of life in Chinese society.

For the Chinese, the soybean ranks among the five essential grains of life (along with rice, barley, wheat, and millet). *Compendium of Materia Medica* (《本草纲目》) states, “Soybeans are good for the liver, invigorating *Qi* and supplementing blood. The nutrients in soybeans are adequate for human health, but people with [a] cough and gout should not eat many.”

Moreover, according to the records of Chinese Herbal Medicine, soybeans are particularly valuable to protect against all the complications of the heart, brain, kidneys, spleen, stomach and eyes. For example, a dish of eggplants and soybeans is beneficial for the spleen and stomach; when cooked with peanuts and rice, soybeans will work to nourish the spleen and alleviate edema.

Modern Research:

Soybeans contain significant amounts of carbohydrates, protein,